Along with Ed Bullins and Amiri Baraka, Larry Neal was one of the most influential scholars, authors and philosophers of the Black Arts Movement. He has been characterized as a spiritual journeyman of the Black Arts Movement. More than any other figure, more even than his more famous associate, Amiri Baraka, whose influence on his generation of writers alone surpasses Neal's, Larry Neal held the movement together by raising it to a level of self-conscious Black power echoing and perhaps transcending that of the so-called Second Harlem Renaissance. Larry Neal worked as a critic, poet, folklorist, playwright, filmmaker, editor, teacher, and administrator. His successful blending of these creative expressions, interpenetrated by a determined attempt to render the world meaningful in terms congruent with the Black American experience, made Neal an exemplary figure in the Black Arts Movement—the creative efflorescence of Black American artists that occurred between 1964 and 1973. The movement's major concerns were to articulate an aesthetic derived from actual and intuited Black American artist, responsible to a Black community. Neal's attempts to realize these concerns were multifaceted and not confined to preconceived notions about evaluating and defining art. Much of Western-based critical methodology was dismissed by him as incapable of evaluating Black art as art was viewed not as an artifact but as a process.

Regardless of the Black Arts Movement's ultimate uniqueness, philosophical soundness, or relative success, Larry Neal's life can be viewed as a masterful application of that movement's theory. The absence in his work of the
excesses that often characterize the theoretician's attempt to operationalize theory, along with his eclectic honesty, makes his work representative of the best that the Black Arts Movement had to offer.

Larry Neal occupied a special and preeminent place among his generation of Afro-American writers, and he did so largely through some of his essay-manifestos for which he remains best known. Neal's reorientation of critical focus—his stress on the importance of racial and political consciousness in the forging of a uniquely Afro-American ethos, or "Black aesthetic"—is rooted in the change of sensibility from what has been termed an "assimilationist" to a "Nationalist" perspective, occurring in the early sixties among Afro-American thinkers.

What Neal has done is to give that change its most precise and cogent critical justification. His insistence upon preserving continuity in the Afro-American tradition by affirming its myriad complexities of style (a principle marvelously reflected in his unique contribution to the achievement of modern Black poetry), his demonstration of scholarship's place in the formation of politically founded statement; his constant assertion that expression itself, understood in all its material intricacy, can be a supreme act of community—all this made Neal's articulation of the Black Arts Movement at once a declaration and a constant challenge to which dozens of artists have avowedly responded.

His "critical nationalism," unlike that of many of his peers, was thus an instrument of great discrimination and effect; the understanding of modern culture's plurality, of the interplay (however violent) of contemporary languages and national styles, cleared areas for conquest of a simpler ethnocentricity could not envision. There is thus in the sum of his labours a persuasiveness, a breadth
of insight that engendering—without, as Larry himself would be quick to add, losing its rootedness in that very crucible of ideological conflict.

Neal's mastery, moreover, lies not simply in the general devising of the movement's program, but in the particular instances of its demonstration as well. There is much that will live among the classic pages of Neal's works: one is arrested by the exhilarating presence of an intelligence superbly exact, and having within reach formidable resources of historical, cultural, and textual knowledge. Time and again, that intelligence is brought into close, subtle commerce with the text, image, figure, or idea in question in an act of total awareness which is often itself art.

Yet we must see that the vitalizing power of "The Black Arts Movement," is philosophical and prescriptive. Everywhere in his writing, Neal has shown the capacity to materialize his theoretic arguments in sudden myths—hence he sets aside a number of terms and turns of phrase that remain uniquely his though now widely employed ("Black Arts Movement," Afro-American ethos," "the presence of ancestry," "the evocation of ritual -symbolic nommo," etc). He is difficult to quote from, however, because the progress of response charted in his work is continuous and densely woven: a fact which helps explain, perhaps, the exceptionally wide audience his critical works commanded. Neal always wrote as a man addressing others about the urgency of human affairs in their totality. His writing will survive because he made of it an act of pivotal social intelligence that marked, in turn, a signal movement in the history of Afro-American ideas.

Larry Neal was born in Atlanta, Georgia, to Woodie and Maggie Neal. His family moved to Philadelphia when Neal was quite young, and it was in
Philadelphia that Larry and his four brothers grew up. His parents, in their particular ways, provided the foundation from which different aspects of his creative career developed. Specifically, his father's insistence on self-reliance and practical life seems to have predisposed Larry to nationalist politics, and his mother's determination to have her sons well educated—she became a Catholic so that they could enroll in a Catholic school—seems to have predisposed Larry to scholarly pursuits. Neal graduated from Roman Catholic High School in Philadelphia in 1956 with an academic degree, and he graduated from Lincoln University, a predominantly Black school in Pennsylvania in 1961. Lincoln University counts among its former students and alumni a number of Black intellectuals—Langston Hughes, Gil Scott-Heron, Kwame Nkrumah, and Thurgood Marshall—who have made significant contributions to literature, music, and government. After Lincoln University provided Neal with a solid foundation in English and history, he did graduate work at the University of Pennsylvania, which provided him with the opportunity to develop his interest in folklore, an interest which became increasingly pronounced as his literary career developed.

After Neal received an M.A. from the University of Pennsylvania in 1963, he moved to New York in 1964. The next year he married Evelyn Rodgers of Fairfield, Alabama. They adopted a son, Avatar, in 1971. The marriage was sustaining and interestingly balanced. Evelyn Neal, though a chemist by profession, seems to have invigorated Neal's prolific creative output like a catalytic agent.

New York, where until his death Neal maintained his official residence in a section of Harlem once labeled Sugar Hill, was a marvelous laboratory for Neal's
explorations in folklore and was of course a magnet for creative individuals. There Neal came to know and interacted with many of the literary figures whose works attracted attention during the late 1960s and the early 1970s, including Ishmael Reed, Quincy Troupe, Askia Muhammad Toure, C.H. Fuller, Stanley Crouch, Henry Dumas, and Amiri Baraka (Le Roi Jones).

While working as a copywriter for John Wiley and Sons in 1964, Neal wrote for *Liberator* magazine, a publication for which he eventually became arts editor. During his *Liberator* period (1964-1966), he wrote journalistic accounts of cultural events and conducted interviews with Black writers, artists, and musicians. The work that best prefigures interests which were to dominate his creative career—particularly the elimination of what W.E.B. DuBois labeled a double consciousness—is a two-part analysis entitled "The Development of LeRoi Jones" which treated Jones's transformation from a Beat poet to a revolutionary artist. The relationship between Jones and Neal, which dates back at least to Neal's arrival in New York, was a quite solid one that continued over the course of Neal's life. The two were principal movers in a group that created the Black Arts Repertory Theater in Harlem in 1964.

The political climate among Black activists in New York during the *Liberator* period was quite volatile, and discussions of political ideology sometimes found cruel expression in acts of violence. In 1965, upon leaving the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, a branch of the New York Public Library, Neal was shot by an individual who found his politics disagreeable. Details of the incident are not somewhat clear: Neal was hospitalized, the wound
requiring a period of recuperation. The shooting incident indicated the destructive level to which impassioned ideological discussion might sink.

Holding true to the claim that Neal was a main figure in the Black Arts Movement along with Amiri Baraka, he supplied the concepts for the foundation of the Movement till his death of a massive heart attack in 1981. His essays and commentaries are numerous and extremely influential on the ideology of the Black Arts Movement and the history of Black Art. He helped to establish several literary journals and is noted for his work with Liberator Magazine, Black Theatre Magazine, Negro Digest and Black World.

Neal’s belief in the centrality of Black American music to developing a Black aesthetic is prefigured in his interviews of Black musicians, especially his interview with Archie Shepp. In 1966 and 1967 Neal published a number of essays in Negro Digest that explored the centrality of Black music and Black musicians to a Black aesthetic. Perhaps Neal’s interest in deriving an aesthetic, or at least an aspect of the aesthetic, from the music, is in part attributable to his abilities as pianist and a flutist. His familiarity with the technical aspects of music no doubt deepened his work as a music critic. Also, his concern to place music near the center of theorizing about a Black aesthetic is similar to the concerns of other black writers, most notably Ralph Ellison, Albert Murray, and Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones).

In 1968 Neal and Baraka edited Black Fire: An Anthology of Afro-American Writing, and Neal wrote two important essays that sought to define the Black Arts Movement. Just as Alain Locke’s New Negro captured the spirit of the Harlem Renaissance, Black Fire captured the spirit of the Black Arts Movement. Still the
seminal anthology of that period, *Black Fire* contains works by well-known social critics, poets, and playwrights such as Harold Cruse, Stokely Carmichael, Sonia Sanchez, and Ed Bullins; it also features works by lesser-known writers such as William Mahoney, Lindsey Barret, Marvin Jackmon (Marvin X), and Charles Fuller. Fuller, a Philadelphian dramatist, was an early friend of Neal's, and the two remained close, commenting on each other's work and sharing observations concerning world politics, until Neal's death.

Critical reaction to *Black Fire* was polarized along racial and ideological lines. Some white critics implicitly acknowledged that the anthology was guided by an aesthetic different from the one used to evaluate most American literature, yet they used the mainstream aesthetic to guide their observations. Generally they felt that the literature suffered from rhetorical or ideological union with politics. Edward Margolies, the reviewer for *Library Journal*, commented: "However justified the anger and politics of these young writers... shoddy writing is shoddy writing is shoddy writing, and those pieces do not suddenly become revolutionary or Africanized as a result of their stance or liberally sprinkled obscenities". Black critical reaction, though not uniformly positive (some older, more established critics were unsure about the anthology's bold dismissal of Western critical standards), was similar to Addison Gayle's observation that:

*Black Fire* was a coming of age of a literary movement which owed much to the novels of John Killens, William Melvin Kelley, and Richard Wright, to the poetry of Askia Muhammad Toure, Don L.
Lee, Sonia Sanchez and Ishmael Reed, to the publishing ventures of such magazines as *Liberator, Umbra, Journal of Negro Poetry* and *Negro Digest*, and to the establishment of Amiri Baraka’s Black Arts Repertory Theater of Harlem in 1964.²

The anthology remains a widely used text in many Afro-American studies courses.

From 1976 to 1979 Neal worked as Executive Director of the Commission on the Arts and Humanities in Washington during this period he also served as Andrew W. Mellon Humanist in Residence at Howard University, where he participated in a wide variety of programs on Afro-American creative culture, especially programs concerning music and theater.

Neal made five television appearances, usually as a moderator of Black-oriented program between 1964 and 1970. Among the guests that he interviewed on *Soul, Like It Is*, and *Time for America*, programs which aired on ABC and CBS in New York City, were Harry Belafonte, Lena Horne, Clayton Riley, and Nikki Giovanni. Neal also wrote and helped produce three scripts for television. “Deep River,” a program concerning the Black church, aired in summer 1967 on ABC’s *Direction*. He was the Associate Director of “The New Ark,” a film concerning Amiri Baraka’s political organization which aired in the winter of 1968, and he also helped write “Lenox Avenue Sunday,” a musical about Harlem which aired on CBS’s *Repertory Workshop* in 1966. In addition he wrote scripts for two films for private institutions: *Moving On Up*, a film about the joint apprenticeship training program for the A. Philip Randolph Institute in 1973, and *Holler S.O.S.* a medical film for John: Hopkins in 1971.
As an academician, Neal taught at six universities, including City College of New York (1968-1969) and Yale University (1970-1975). He was also writer in residence at Wesleyan University (1969-1970). Among the numerous universities at which Neal lectured or did readings are Case Western Reserve, Morehouse College, University of Pennsylvania, Tuskegee Institute, New York University, and the University of Ibadan.

Neal's poetry and essays have been heavily anthologized. Some of the anthologies in which his work appears are *American Negro Poetry, Black American Literature, and Twentieth Century Views of Ralph Ellison, New Black Voices, and giant Talk*. Neal also worked as a consultant to a number of foundations and organizations that supported the arts, including the Elma Louis School of Arts in Roxbury, Massachusetts, the Teacher and Writer's Collective of Columbia University, the American Academy of Arts, and the Gordy foundation. Such activities indicate the range of Neal's talent and energy. Although his creative talent was shaped by even as he helped shape, the Black Arts Movement, Neal was able to function in a fashion that avoided what some critics of that movement labeled "narrow nationalism," an unwillingness to explore cultures that are not derivative of Africa.

"New Space: Critical Essays on American Culture." Which was to be published by Howard University Press, was one of the projects that remained unfinished at Neal's death from a heart attack in 1981. Several of the essays in the volume had been published previously. In the new essays, especially the title essay, "New Space," Neal argues for a new synthesis, critiquing the Sixties Black Consciousness Movement and suggesting how Black cultural life might be
improved. "Uncle Rufus Raps on the Squared Circle," which was published in a 1972 issue of the Partisan Review is perhaps the most entertaining piece in the book. A folkloristic analysis of the first Ali-Frazier fight, it uses music as a metaphor to explain the difference in style between the two fighters. Frazier has the rhythm of the blues and in the first fight succeeded in fiving. Ali the blues. Ali has a jazz rhythm that ultimately lacks the consistency and the staying power of the blues. Neal had also completed a screenplay based on Zora Neale Hurston's novel Their Eyes were Watching God. Although several public broadcasting stations have expressed interest in it, none has purchased it.

Of the several genres in which Neal worked, his poetry and cultural theory are most striking. One of the clearest and most reasoned voices to emerge from the Black Arts Movement, he applied in his poetry the theories he helped to shape. His brief life of forty-three years is noteworthy for its contribution to Black letters and culture.

In his most famous essay "The Black Arts Movement", Larry Neal asserts that the movement is "the aesthetic and spiritual sister of the Black Power concept and as such "proposes a radical reordering of the Western cultural aesthetic" through "a separate symbolism, mythology, critique, and iconology"." Many critics regard this essay as the clearest statement as to the aims and goals of the Black Arts Movement. The wedding of art and politics is the basis of the argument presented in another of Neal's 1968 essays, "Cultural Nationalism and Black Theater," which can be viewed as a generic explication of the aims and goals of the Black Arts Movement.
In the very beginning of his essay, "The Black Arts Movement", Larry Neal says that the movement "is radically opposed to any concept of the artist that alienates him from his community". This statement clearly emphasises on the idea that the exclusive purpose of a writer under this movement is to connect him closely to the revolutionary and conscious ideology of the Black race, Black culture and Black thought. The writings must be the exclusive outcome of Black subject matters. It is a purposeful art, which must be an integral part of "Black Power Concept, which means such an art must help Black people generate strength in every possible way. So this kind of art is fully committed. It must create its special position by radically reordering the western cultural aesthetic.

Neal wants that the disordered society or more directly, the white dominated society must be reordered so that the definition and characteristics of all the systems of the society must systematically represent Black People’s reformative identity. He is of the opinion that this movement must bring a revolutionary, reformative and conscious social change by which the symbolism, mythology, critique and iconology of the Black People will receive special attention as well as approval of all. The Black Arts is thus directed by an exposition of self-determined and a talented system of art, culture and society of the Black People. It establishes relationship between art and politics and includes all categories of Black People. It includes dramatists, poets, choreographers, musicians, and novelists. Neal says that the writers under this movement must reflect in their works Black man’s experience as well as his conscious effort for achieving justice where injustice is imposed. He advocates for "a cultural revolution in art and ideas." He says that the cultural values inherent in western history must either be radicalized or destroyed. As he feels that radicalization is probably impossible,
what is needed is the destruction of old cultural values and the creation of a whole new system of ideas. To emphasize this point Neal quotes the opinion of the poet, Don L. Lee:

...We must destroy Faulkner, Dick, Jane, and other perpetuators of evil. It's time for DuBois, Nat Turner, and Kwame Nkrumah. As Frantz Fanon points out: destroy the culture and you destroy the people. This must not happen. Black artists are culture stabilizers; bringing back old values, and introducing new ones. Black Art will talk to the people and with the will of the people stop impending "protective custody".

Larry Neal calls this kind of revival to be new aesthetics of the Black people and is quite optimistic that Black artists can only bring back old values and stabilize culture. He asserts that Black people are quite capable of bringing necessary and effective changes or reforms in society. As the white aesthetic has already made them down-trodden, they have to establish a useful Black aesthetic in terms of Black forms, Black values, Black song, and all other things related to Black people. This includes Black American cultural tradition, usable elements of Third World Culture, destruction of white ideas and white ways of looking at the world, of white ideas a meaningful vision of existence of Black people, strengthening of Black morality and proving fairness of Black people. Neal quotes Brother Knight who also has some interesting statements about the development of a "Black Aesthetic":

Unless the Black artist establishes a "Black aesthetic", he will have no future at all. To accept the white aesthetic is to accept and
validate a society that will not allow him to live. The Black artist must create new forms and new values, sing new songs for purify old ones); and along with other Black authorities, he must create a new history, new symbols, myths and legends (and purify old ones by fire). And the Black artist, in creating his own aesthetic, must be accountable for it only to the Black people. Further, he must hasten his own dissolution as an individual for it only to the Black people. Further, he must hasten his own dissolution as an individual (in the Western sense)-painful though the process may be, having been breast-fed the poison of "individual experience".

When Larry Neal speaks of a "Black Aesthetic", he assumes that there is already in existence the basis for such an aesthetic. Essentially, it consists of an African-American cultural tradition. The new aesthetic is mostly predicated on an Ethics which asks a number of important questions: whose vision of the world is finally more meaningful, Black people's or the white oppressors' "What is truth"? Or more precisely, whose truth will the Black artists express, that of the oppressed or of the oppressors? These are the basic questions which Black intellectuals of previous decades (prior to Black Arts Movement) failed to ask them. Therefore, the Black artists of the Black Arts movement must address themselves to this reality in the strongest terms possible.

Larry Neal insists that in a context of world upheaval, ethics and aesthetics must interact positively and be consistent with the demands for a more spiritual world. Consequently, the Black Arts Movement is an Ethical movement-Ethical, from the viewpoint of the oppressed. And much of the oppression
confronting the Third World and Black America is directly traceable to the Euro-
American cultural sensibility. This sensibility, anti-human in nature, has until
recently, dominated the psyches of most Black artists and intellectuals; hence it
must be destroyed before the Black creative artist can have a meaningful role in
the transformation of society. It is this natural reaction to an alien sensibility,
Larry Neal says, that informs the cultural attitudes of the Black Arts and the
Black Power movement. It is a profound ethical sense that makes a Black artist
question a society in which art is one thing and the actions of men another. The
Black Arts Movement believes that Black artist's ethics and aesthetics are one.
That the contradictions between ethics and aesthetics in Western Society is
symptomatic of a dying culture.

Black aesthetic does not believe in abstraction in literature. It emphasizes
that literature must be concrete, forceful and full of physical entities. Literature
must raise a collective Black consciousness.

The plays and poems, in particular, must be written exclusively on the
basis of Black American cultural and political dynamics. These forms of art must
act as radical alternatives to the sterility of the existing American theatre and
poetry. These forms must be spirited, and must present Black people in their
interaction with their Black brothers as well as the white people. It is a step
forward to a larger confrontation between the coloniser and the colonised, the
slave-master and the slave. The subject matters of poetry the characters and
themes of the plays must represent the new Afro-American sensibility, informed
by the psychological revolution operating within the Black America. Thus Neal
calls for the Black awakening both in the extremist and the moderate ways. He
calls it as "New Spirituality" that is opposed to the earlier concept of "Old Spirituality". He says:

The Old Spirituality is generalized. It seeks to recognise universal humanity. The New Spirituality is specific. It begins by seeing the world from the concise point-of-view of the colonialized. Where the Old Spirituality would live with oppression while ascribing to the oppressors an innate goodness, the New Spirituality demands a radical shift in point-of-view. The colonialized native, the oppressed must, of necessity, subscribe to a separate morality. One that will liberate him and his people.8

Thus the writings under this movement must make the Black people understand a profound re-evaluation of the Black man’s presence in America.

Larry Neal admits that the term "Black Arts" is of ancient origin, but it was first used in a positive sense by LeRoi Jones:

We are unfair
And unfair
We are black magicians
Black arts we make
In black labs of the heart
The fair are fair
And deathly white
The day will not save them

And we own the night.9

Neal also refers to a section of the poem "Black Dada Nihilismus" that carries the same motif. But a fuller amplification of the nature of the new aesthetics appears in the poem "Black Art." Neal quotes a portion of this poem and says "poetry is a concrete function, an action. No more abstractions. Poems are physical entities: fists, daggers, airplane poems, and poems that shoot guns. Poems are transformed from physical objects into personal forces".10 Then the poem affirms the integral relationship between Black Art and Black people:

...Let Black people understand that they are the lovers and the sons of lovers and warriors and sons of warriors Are poems and poets and all the loveliness here in the world"11

Then the poem ends with the following lines, a central assertion in both the Black Arts Movement and the philosophy of Black Power:

We want a black poem. And a

Black World.

Let the world be a Black Poem

And let All Black People Speak. This Poem silently

Or LOUD.12

Neal says that the poem "Black Art" comes to stand for the collective conscious and unconscious of Black America-the real impulse in back of the Black Power
movement, which is the will toward self-determination and nationhood a radical reordering of the nature and function of both art and the artist.

Coming to drama during the Black Arts Movement, Larry Neal points out that in the spring of 1964, Black artists like LeRoi Jones, Charles Patterson, William Patterson, Clarence Reed, Johnny Moore etc opened the Black Arts Repertoire Theatre School. They produced a number of plays by Black artists and initiated a series of poetry readings and concerts. These activities represented the most advanced tendencies in the movement and were of excellent artistic quality. The Black Arts School came under immediate attack by the New York Power Structure. The Establishment, fearing Black creativity, attacked the Theatre and all of its values. Still then, in keeping with its "revolutionary" cultural the Black Arts Theatre took its programmes into the streets of Harlem. For three months, the Theatre presented plays, concerts, and poetry readings to the people of the Black community. The plays that shattered the illusions of the American body politic and awakened Black people to the meaning of their lives proved that there was a definite need for a Cultural Revolution in the Black community.

When the Black Arts Theatre was forced to close because of internal problems, Black Art groups sprang up on the West coast and the idea spread to Detroit, Philadelphia, Jersey City, New Orleans, and Washington D.C. Black Arts Movement began on the campuses of San Francisco State College, Lincoln University, Columbia University and Oberlin College etc. In this connection, Neal refers to Maulana Karenga who welded the Black Arts Movement into a cohesive cultural ideology which owed much to the works of LeRoi Jones. Neal appreciates
Karenge who sees culture as the most important element in the struggle for self determination:

Culture is the basis of all ideas, images and actions. To move is to move culturally, i.e., by a set of values given to you by your culture.

Without a culture Negroes are only a set of reactions to white people.13

Though a dramatist himself, Larry Neal praises the role of LeRoi Jones in drama and says that Jones represents the most advanced aspects of the Movement. He is its prime mover and chief designer. The theatre that Jones proposes is inextricably linked to the Afro-American political dynamic. And such a link is perfectly consistent with Black American's contemporary demands. Theatre, according to Neal is potentially the most social of all the arts. It is an integral part of the socializing process. It exists in direct relationship to the audience it claims to serve. The decadence and inanity of the contemporary American theatre, Neal says, is an accurate reflection of the State of American society:

Albee's Who's Afraid Virginia Woolf? is very American: sick white lives in a homosexual hell hole. The theatre of white America is escapist, refusing to confront concrete reality. Into this cultural emptiness come the musicals, an up tempo version of the same state lives. And the use of Negroes in such plays as Hello Dolly and Hallelujah Baby does not alert their nature; it compounds the problem. These plays simply hipper versions of the minstrel show. The present Negroes acting out the hang-ups of middle-class white
America. Consequently, the American Theatre is a palliative prescribed to bourgeois patients who refuse to see the world as it is. Or, more crucially, as the world sees them. 14

On the other hand, the Black Arts Theatre is a radical alternative to the sterility of the American theatre. It is primarily a theatre of the Spirit, confronting the Black man in his interaction with his brothers and with the white thing. In this connection Neal presents a clear picture of the aim and purpose of Black Arts Theatre:

Our theatre will show victims so that their brothers in the audience will be better able to understand that they are the brothers of victims, and that they themselves are blood brothers. And what we show must cause the blood to rush, so that pre-revolutionary temperaments will be bathed in this blood, and it will cause their deepest souls to move, and they will find themselves tensed and clenched, even ready to die, at what the soul has been taught. We will scream and cry, murder, run through the streets in agony, if it means some soul will be moved, moved to actual life understanding of what the world is, and what it ought to be. We are preaching virtue and feeling, and a natural sense of the self in the world. All men live in the world, and the world ought to be a place for them to live. 15

In his essay, "The Black Arts Movement", Larry Neal critically analyses the two plays by LeRoi Jones, *Dutchman* and *The Slave*, and comments on the protagonists of these plays, Clay and Walker Vessels respectively, as the victims of
the white-dominated society. According to Neal, "The confrontation between the black radical (Walker Vessels) and the white liberal (Easley in The Slave) is symbolic of larger confrontations occurring between the Third World and Western Society. It is a confrontation between the colonizer and the colonized, the slavemaster and the slave". He analyses some other plays by LeRoi Jones and appreciates him as the best known and the most advanced playwright of the Movement. He also refers to some other excellent play-wrights of the period who express the general mood of the Black Arts ideology. They are Ron Milner, Ed Bullins, Ben Caldwell, Jimmy Stewart, Joe White, Charles Patterson, Charles Fuller, Aisha Hughes, Carol Freeman and Jimmy Gazzett. Neal beautifully analyses Ron Milner's Who's got His Own, Jimmy-Garrett's We Own the Night and Ben Caldwell's The Militant Preacher from the angle of Black Aesthetic. He says:

These plays are directed at problems within Black America. They begin with the premise that there is a well defined Afro-American audience: An audience that must see itself and the world in terms of its own interests. These plays, along with many others, constitute the basis for a viable movement in the theatre - a movement which takes as its task a profound re-evaluation of the Black man's presence in America. The Black Arts Movement represents the flowering of a cultural nationalism that has been suppressed since the 1920's. I mean the "Harlem Renaissance" which was essentially a failure. It did not address itself to the mythology and the life-styles of the Black community. It failed to take roots, to link itself concretely to the struggles of that
community, to become its voice and spirit. Implicit in the Black Arts Movement is the idea that Black people, however dispersed, constitute a *nation* within the belly of white America."

Thus through this critical analysis in his essay, "The Black Arts Movement", Neal establishes himself as a major critic of the movement.

Neal's first book of poetry, *Black Boogaloo* (1969), suffered from the critical inattention that many works of the Black Arts Movement experienced. It was due to the Black aesthetic's unattractiveness to many of the reviewers for major journals. However, the poetry in *Black Boogaloo* illustrates Neal's fascination with discovering the historical moment when Africans lost their connection with their gods and ancestors, thereby losing themselves. In "Love Song in Middle Passage," the narrator fingers the past attempting to squeeze meaning from it: "Red glow of sea-death mornings and where will it end? and who will end it?" The answers spring from a nationalist consciousness, but they are not straightforward; they acknowledge and use the contradiction between appearance and reality; "We must become stone-cold killers, panther spirits, invisible men/night specters: your uncle tom teeth brightly grin/or scratch your sleepin' steppin' fetchit head;/while thrusting the blade into the beast heart."

The contradiction between appearance (the docile, ignorant mask of Uncle Tom) and reality (the revolutionary's cool, methodical elimination of the oppressor) also illustrates that Neal, like many of the Black writers of this period, was seeking to redefine symbols: bad was good, cool was hot, and Black, most dramatically, was beautiful. As ancestors, Uncle Tom and Stepin Fetchit are no
longer embarrassing anachronistic creations of white racism: their redefinition as useful masks absorbs and transforms an aspect of black history, making it usable.

The ironic juxtaposition of acts of violence with a beautiful and uninvolved nature-in such lines as “On the sea’s horizon McNamara scientists/with Ph.d’s/ lurk.../contrive C.T.A. chaos, while drinking Emmett Till’s/blood. (Welcome to Mississippi/land of sweet magnolias)-occurs in much of Neal’s poetry. Sometimes straight sarcasm, such irony is meant to illuminate the distance between America’s promise and Black America’s reality. This clash between appearance and reality gives Neal’s poetry a sharp edge. Yet generally, the poetry in this volume is not shrill but encompassing due to its historical dimension.

_Hoodoo Hollerin Bebop Ghosts_ (1971), Neal’s second volume of poetry, develops, extends, and deepens some of the thematic and technical concerns that characterize the poetry in _Black Boogaloo_. Perhaps the most distinctive aspect of _Hoodoo Hollerin_ is a new depth, attributable to Neal’s exploration of moments in Black life that provide the context and dimensions of Black folk culture. Less cryptic and predictable than the earlier poetry this more recent poetry employs situations that are not new and are therefore accessible, and it attains its energy from the precise exploration of the individual in familiar surroundings: “We walked the bar trying to get it together-/ghosts of men, but men/just the same... It’s all here /all down here in the neon world of flash/.../even in our weakness here, somewhere we are strong.” After sketching the emotional landscape, Neal presents the actors: “Some of us/teetered on the edge of the Life like peeping/toms; teetered maneuvering for the grand score/that came every
night but every night, came late/dope pushers/take off goons..." The people in Neal's poems are some of America's "Native Sons" at work, folk heroes of limited but real appeal: they have lessons to teach Neal's interest in transforming folk heroes with questionable morals into fuel for Black liberation is illustrated in several poems that have Shine, a Black hero, as their focus: "Shine's Sermon on Cosmology I, "Shine Goes to Jail," and "Shine as the Last Bebopper."

Larry Neal wrote two plays. They are The Glorious Monster in the Bell of the Horn and In an Upstate Motel. The first play, The Glorious Monster in the Bell of the Horn had a reading at Frank Silvera's Writers Workshop at the Harlem Cultural Council in 1976. It is described by one critic as a "lyric drama, a poetic interpretation of the hopes and aspirations of black artists and the middle class on the eve of the dropping of the A-Bomb on Hiroshima." It is a play in three acts produced by Woody King at the New York Federal Theatre on July 6, 1976. An extraordinarily complex play with more than twenty characters, it seems to be an attempt to make family relationship and friendships sensible. The play basically focuses on the characters like Shammy, Dickie, Wally Robinson, Iverson, Henson, Dr. Daventport, Captain Herbie Lee Robinson, Jr., and Herbie Lee Robinson, Sr., Dabney, and Rose.

All the important characters stated above are found in the spotlight scene which centres on radical activities within Black American society. The scene begins with Dickie, the Black revolutionary, requesting Shammy to give him shelter in his house for a few days as he is tracked and hunted down. But Shammy says that he can hide him only for a few hours so that he will survive. Dickie looks quite nervous. He "paces back and forth, nervously puffing a
cigarette. Also the sound of crackling laughter and mad screams are heard low in
the background to suggest the fearful atmosphere. Dickie seems to have killed
some white people in a riot and is satisfied with his action. He feels sorry because
he could not kill more of them. But this note of satisfaction is not appreciated by
Shammy as he says that Dickie’s action is not in keeping with the Black man’s
character. In case of Black man, there is no end to the process of pain and
suffering. He asks Dickie: “And you? When are you dying?... Hunted... haunted...
It is all the same thing... You’re just part of a process... Like some
cycle of pain.... Yeah, like some awful thing that keeps recurring in my life.” (P
151).

Then the spotlight fades. Dickie is found looking at Shammy in absolute
contempt. Now they stare at each other. When Dickie breaks contact first,
Shammy snaps his fingers in reaction. But “suddenly there is literally a barrage of
notes from Herbie’s saxophone, the horn, wails, screaming in some strange
language. Both Dickie and Shammy are momentarily stunned by the sound of the
horn.” (P 151). Dickie is so much frightened that he snatches the revolver ‘45’
from his felt for self-defense, but recovers quickly. Shammy laughs at Dickie for
his foolish reaction. Then “the horn fades down in an elaborate cadenza. Music
interlude. Blaring tune.

Lights dim on Dickie and Shammy and come up on Herbie’s ensemble” (P.
151) Though Shammy refers to Herbie’s music as ‘monsters’, full of terror, both of
them listen to the music of Herbie Lees as “The horn plays lower now, but
restlessly, as if it wore searching for something” (P 151). As to the enquiry of
Dickie about Herbie’s identity Shammy reminds him of the past when both of
them were “too young” and used to listen to the music played by Herbie, Jr’s father at the Blue Note on Ridge Avenue. They “used to stand outside of the door cause they wouldn’t let (them) in “ (P.151). Dickie is reminded of Mr. Rabinson who “got killed on the turn pike going to New York” and Herbie see Lee Jr’s mother “got killed too.... It was a terrible accident...”(P 152). Then a flashback scene is shown on the stage. “Lights slowly rise on Herbert Rabinson, Sr. He has a case with a saxophone in it. He calls to Vera (his wife) who is in the wings” (P 152). The Flashback scene is meant to show that Herbie, Sr. used to be a sincere and talented musician. He and his wife seem to be very busy in playing at musical programmes without taking care of their only baby and without taking him with them. They feel that they neglect their only child Herbie, Jr. only for making money and providing entertainment to others. Thus the flashback comes to an end with silence that follows a beat music.

Suddenly Shammy becomes nostalgic to remember the excellent music played by Herbie, Sr., may it be “blues”, a “ballad”, or “any kind of tune”. Shammy feels greatly romanticised to recollect his memory of Herbie’s music. He feels as if he were accompanying Herbie and his wife:

...sometimes... sometimes... I can see it like I was right there, in the car with them that night, right there, and the think fog on the turnpike curling, and foaming at us like ghosts... And you see, Herbert’s got his horn out now, polishing it... Taking care of it, like it was a baby ready for Nursing... And them, he puts it in his mouth; and I am right there beside-it’s winter, and we’re wearing tweed suits, and I’m right there in the car, right there in the fog
with the song... And Vera is wearing that purple dress the one Wally bought her.... Now... now Herbert, Mr. Robinson got that horn in his mouth... then Herbert starts playing this tune... This tune... This tune... Yeah, it was... (P 153).

Shammy stops suddenly almost exhausted and seems to be having difficulty in breathing as he recollects the incident leading to the accidental death of Herbie Lee's father, Mr. Herbert Robinson:

Yeah... Yeah, it was sudden. So sudden that Herbie's father didn't even have time, or didn't want to take that horn out of his mouth... And then...then the force of the collision drove the horn back and down his throat, yes, and the steel curled up and around them, and the horn. It pressed into his head and body... And the state troopers came, they had to pry the horn out of his head...the battered instrument was splattered with blood, and bits of Herbert's guts clung to the keys. (P P 153-154).

The broken horn was later repaired by an old Black man and was given to Herbie Lee Jr. The horn sounds frightening like some glorious monster bursting free...” (P 154).

Then the mode of the play changes and Madame Blue is found slowly dancing across the stage. “She wears a blue transparent veil; she is naked underneath the veil... she dances with a staff which is shaped like a serpent... Behind the scrim, there is a bed that represents her sanctuary”(P 155). Madam Blue's dance has a sexual connotation that makes Shammy discover “madness that is lucid... rational” (P 155). Dickie fails to understand how can madness be rational and asks Shammy whether that woman is part of that madness or just
one of his “pretenses…shadows…illusions (P 156). Then Dickie points the gun at Shammy but does not fire. As the stage darkens, Shammy leaves the place. Dickie looks helpless and requests Shammy not to leave him alone and “fires the gun into the darkness” (P 157).

The scene changes to a barbershop owned by Wally Robinson and a small cabinet is found behind the barber’s chair, where a radio is placed. There is an important radio announcement showing the bravery of Negro soldiers in the war against fascism establishing the importance of Black Power:

Somewhere in the Pacific… coloured troops have been active in a major military offensive against Japanese troops. All Negro units led by colonel Wilmer F. Lucas have destroyed Key Japanese defensive bunkers… Walter white, Secretary of the N. double A.C.P. says that the recent wave of Negro victories in the war against fascism puts a lie to the myth that the Negro soldier is incapable of sustained military combat. (P 157).

Wally Robinson, snaps off the radio and speaks to the audience and patrons at the café tables the radio” (P 157). He goes on saying about the importance of the barbershop : “this barbershop used to be the best place to come and sit and think” (P 158). But his speech is interrupted by the arrival of a Black radical, Peter Iverson who says philosophically that he has an “appointment with Destiny…. The destiny of the coloured peoples of the world” (P 158). He is the real spokesman of the Black people in their revolution against the white race. Though he was the chief technician in charge of maintenance at the arsenal, he left his job of his own accord to continue his radical activities against the whites.
But his termination was given a distorted picture by Henson, a confused Blackman supporting the whites, that Iverson was fired from his job "as a security risk" (P158). That is why Iverson is bent upon exposing Henson and other Black men supporting the whites:

Security risk? That's a laugh... In their system, any intelligent coloured man is a security risk.... But Henson is confused...

Henson is spreading ignorance... Henson and Negroes like him have never been able to get the facts straight... Never! And that's what's wrong with the race... Her children are fighting a war, and they don't begin to know who the real enemy is... It's all confusion... But... but they'll know soon... (P 159)

Iverson is quite optimistic about the future possibilities of the Black people. But he severely criticises the white people and the government run by them for their lies and pretensions:

That's a lie! This government is lying.... This war won't end until -

... Because they always lie. They can't help but lie. It is their nature to lie. That's why this war... this war will continue.... They have lied about so many things: Science, art, history - (P 159).

In the stage Herbie Lee's saxophone is heard as another character Rose, a lady poet in love with Herbie Lee, arrives with her song of philosophy of body that impresses everybody present there. She is followed by another character Chris Henson. Both Wally and Iverson, who are also present there, talk about one Marcus Garvey who has built "a Black army," an "all-colored army, staffed with all-coloured personnel from top to bottom" (P 161). Iverson appreciates the
action of Garvey saying, "If he had lived we would be well by now... from the beast.... That is how we designate the European" (P 161).

The voice of Iverson becomes more radical when he talks about the fate of the Black people and, points out that it is the ignorance" among the Black people which they "must triumph over." (P 162). He continues saying that "It is time to confront that chaos which is our role and design". (P 162) He rejects the idea of Henson that he is "against God" and against "this country" and says that they have "no country" at all (P 163). Just at that time the reappearance of Shammy creates a great dramatic effect. As a radical he recollects the past condition of Black people which was full of misery and sorrow:

In the ole days they used to carry the slaves out into the woods when they killed them... Yes chillen... when they killed them... They... They... jest leave em there just like animals... They didn't even bury em then... The bodies would just lay out under the sun for the buzzards to gnaw on... (P 163).

He then narrates a meaningful story of one old slave named John. He says that this old slave was innocent and simple. The white tyrants used to put him to work as a slave worker in the plantations. But one day, while sitting alone in the forest, near a skull, he strangely heard the skull say, "Tongue is the cause of being here" (P 164). He was startled to hear the skull speaking. He went to his white master and narrated this. His white master came to the place of the skeleton with a group of white folks but the skeleton did not speak. Then they became angry with John and "beat John to death,... and left him beside the other skeleton" (P 164). But strangely enough, these bones and skulls got
together and spoke, "Tongue, yes tongue brought us here, and tongue brought you here too" (P 164). The allusion of Shammy is quite meaningful here since he says so to make his people conscious that time has already come for them to raise their voice against white dominance, racial exploitation, injustice and suppression.

The final event of the scene comes to reflect the purpose of the play more meaningfully. After completing the story, Shammy points a cane that he holds "in the direction of Doctor Davenport's office" (P 164). Davenport, a white Doctor is in a hurry to go to the emergency room gets the information that Military police have arrived. "Right at this moment a short black MAN dressed in a captain's uniform enters the doctor's office... He is flanked by two very tall Negro MPs.... The two MPs are armed, and they stand at the ready" (P 165). Captain Dabney informs the doctor that they have come to conduct "a legal search of the premises. It is because the doctor is the father of Richard. B. Davenport, Junior who has been charged with military crimes like "Illegally procuring weapons, "assault... desertion murder" (P 166). Doctor Davenport tries to defend his son by telling "There must be some kind of mistake". The scene comes to an end with the Public Address System announcing the name of Doctor Davenport repeatedly.

_The Glorious Monster in the Bell of the Horn_ gives us a series of accounts relating Black people. First of all, it gives us an idea about the love of music of the Black people and the loss they incur because of the loss of people like Herbie Robinson, Sr. The loss of music is just like loss of life for them. Though they provide such nice spiritual and artistic entertainment to the whites, they receive only torture from them. They can never think of losing music because in music
lies their ancestral memory. This incident follows the consciousness of Black people like Shammy and Wally Robinson about the misery that Black people face in the white dominated society. But this stage of consciousness becomes deeper with the arrival of another racially-conscious character like Inverson who tries to inject the idea of Black identity, Black unity and Black Power among the Black people. He points out the mistake of Black in not recognising their potentiality for which they suffer. He emphasizes how lack of consciousness and their ignorance about a lot of things put the Black people into sheer misery. He points out how they sacrifice themselves for war and other national activities without having the slightest knowledge of the cause and effect. His idea of Black consciousness is again strengthened by the reappearance of Shammy towards the end whose description of the misery of Black people right from the past till the present echoes his real “discovery of madness” (P 155) as well as Iverson’s “Appointment with Destiny” (P 158). Thus the play presents the subject matters of Black consciousness, Black experience and Black destiny very powerfully through the set of characters who are ready to possess weapons, revive music, discuss and teach their people and participate in active politics in order to bring about a change in their position in the white dominated society. In comparison to Baraka and Buttins, Larry Neal may be a less important playwright, but the analysis of this play gives us an idea that he superbly synthesises the Black consciousness of Baraka and the Black experience of Bullins here. He emerges with the dynamics of "Black destiny" which seems to be more advanced and decisive than the previous two concepts of Baraka and Bullins. The glorious monster of Black consciousness still blows the horn with a call for Black destiny. It is here clear
that though the concern of the play is primarily existential, it has an introspective and healing touch for Black people.

His second play, *In an Upstate Motel* was staged by the Negro Ensemble Company in the spring of 1981 and was not widely reviewed. This play appears to be transitional: When Neal found some of the prescriptions of the Black Arts Movement inadequate to the task of some of the prescriptions exploring different aspects of Black life, he, like number of Black artists who influenced as were influenced by the Movement, may well have been in the process of redefining his approach to art. It is curiously an existential play-curious because of its circular and therefore hopeless quality. Interestingly enough the play centres around two important characters, a Black man and a Black woman, who try their best to rework their lives after a “hit” that does not go as planned. Cocaine addicts who punctuate time with sexual gymnastics, these characters are having proletarian background and pedestrian concerns with their proletarian way of life, they resemble the characters in Ed Bullin’s *In New England Winter*, though Bullin’s characters are more fully shaped. *In an Upstate Motel* is subtitled as A Morality Play. It deals with the question of existence of the Black people in a white dominated society. It teaches the Black people to be conscious of their position in society so that they can bring some change in their way of life. A further critical analysis of the play presents the idea that the Black man and the woman, like Shammy and Iverson in *The Glorious Monster in the Bell of the Horn*, are at par with the male and the female protagonists of Baraka’s plays. Like Walker Vessels of *The Slave* or Damu of *Junkies are full of SHHHH...*, they too teach resignation to their community. The Black woman of *In An Upstate Motel*
acts more practically and effectively than the Black Woman of Madheart. Although a few in number, the Black characters in Neal’s plays act powerfully as models for their Black brothers and sisters in bringing a change in their social position. They serve the purpose of the Black Arts Movement by uniting art, politics and commitment into one reformative arena. Henson, the Black unconscious character of The Glorious Monster, resembles some of the way and Black characters of the plays of Baraka and Bullins. He may be like Steve, but he has come round to the point of Black destiny because that is what Neal asserts finally. A close examination of both the plays of Larry Neal, The Glorious Monster in the Bell of the Horn and In an Upstate Motel gives us a clear-out idea that Neal tries to propagate the ideas of the Black Arts Movement through them. As an authoritative advocate of such a movement, he wants to make his message reach his community effectively through his plays. In the beginning of The Glorious Monster in the Bell of the Horn, Dickie is found helpless because he is haunted by the whites. He wants to hide himself for a few days to escape the horror of reality. His companion Shammy makes Dickie’s helplessness a philosophical matter by referring to the question of human survival, “a process... Like some cycle of pain” (P. 151). As a result, from the very beginning both of them reject the society radically because they find themselves alienated from it. This sense of outright rejection of the white dominated society is strengthened when they shift their discussion to Herbie’s saxophone. Their conversation about Herbies saxophone, the sad demise of Herbie Robinson Sr. and the sweet music connected with the saxophone is not only a memory to them but also a sad revelation of the soul of the Black community. It speaks of “the spiritual and cultural needs of Black people” 19. It is a recollection of their past and a re-evaluation of the
"western aesthetics". Larry Neal tries to define the world of the Black Americans in their own terms. As the Black Americans are just like dead men in the past, they have to depend upon the present considering time to be a great healing factor for them. Instead of taking time as an eternal flow that will not bring any change, they should rather reevaluate time in terms of time past, time present and time future so that an effective change can be brought in the system. As Shammy philosophises:

Shammy (almost shouting): Time?! You don't know what time is, fool! Think of that time, and this time, we call now... This time which is not and which is; You are that time and this time, tonight... (P 155).

The dialogue seems to be very powerful as it compares “that time” with “this time”, that is, the past with the present and emphasises on the fact that in comparison to the deceptive past, the present is the only reality for the Black Americans to bring future possibilities.

The portion of the play, that begins with the arrival of Iverson, again propagates the nationalistic, political and revolutionary aspect of the Black Arts Movement. As is said earlier, it synthesises the Black consciousness and the Black experience to bring about the Black destiny. Iverson’s pondering over war, the role the government and the unconsciousness of Black people about their misery is thought provoking. He points out that the Black people are potent enough to bring about a change in their present condition. He says that they are in chaos now and facts about the Black people are "both real and metaphysical". So Neal uses the voice of Iverson to speak that "It is time to confront that chaos which is
our role and design”, (P 162). Thus as a Black creative artist, Neal tries to play a meaningful role in the transformation of society. Iverson’s voice becomes more potent when he confronts the protest of Henson. He says that this movement of unity of Black Arts and Black power is “whirlwind” and it will make the morbid mind of the unconscious Black people obsolete”. The final role of Shammy in reflecting their misery and the role of Captain Dabney in accusing the white Doctor’s son of murder make the end message of the play revolutionary. This reflects Neal’s statement that these plays will shatter “the illusions of the American body politic”, and awaken “Black people to the meaning of their lives”.

The play, with its varieties of subject matter, represents the lyric emotion of the playwright, which is rare in others. In addition, Neal attempts to serve his purpose of writing plays, which is “potentially the most social of all the arts”. He writes plays not for plays sake but for the sake of making them “an integral part of the socializing process”.

To conclude, we must quote Amiri Baraka, who says of himself and Neal brilliantly:

I found Larry was an artist, writer after our mutually expressed commitment to destroy white supremacy... It was part of our commitment to the black revolutionary democratic struggle that we collaborated to create BARTS in Harlem... the institution set a concrete example of the Movement it was part of- the Black Arts Movement! The movement by young black artists in the 60s to create an art, a literature that would fight for black people’s
liberation with as much intensity as Malcolm X.... An art that would educate and unite black people in our attack on an anti-black racist America.... What we wanted to create would be African. American and Revolutionary. In fact it would be the real link to our history - part of the mainstream of black Art through the century. Larry is the spiritual leader of this Movement. 23

He says that Larry Neal is one of the most major models of the Black Arts Movement who incorporated the oral tradition, the sound, the pumping rhythm of black music and the blues into his works properly. He is full of "High intelligence, revolutionary commitment, and skill.... came at a period of rising political intensity, struggle and consciousness. He passed it on, like the black baton of our history to any who knew him or was moved or influenced by him."24

Neal has successfully worked in several genres. His literary works as well as Black cultural theory are striking. He stands as one of the clearest and reasoned Black American voices of the 1960s. His brief life of forty-three years must contribute immensely to several generations of Black Americans.

Notes

1 Edward Margolies. quoted in DLB 38, 227-228.

2 Addison Gayle. quoted in DLB 38, 228.

3 Larry Neal, "The Black Arts Movement", Twentieth Century Dramatic Review, 12, No. 4 (Summer,1968), 29

4 Larry Neal, 29

5 Quoted by Larry Neal, 29-30.

6 Quoted by Larry Neal, 30.
Larry Neal, 39

8 Quoted by Larry Neal, 31.

9 Quoted in DLB 38, 229.

10 Larry Neal, 31.

11 Quoted by Larry Neal, 31-32.

12 Quoted by Larry Neal, 32.

13 Quoted by Larry Neal, 33.

14 Quoted by Larry Neal, 33.

15 Quoted by Larry Neal, 34.

16 Larry Neal, 35.

17 Larry Neal, 39.

18 Quoted in DLB 38, 229.


All subsequent references to this play are to this edition and have been incorporated in the text itself.

20 Larry Neal, P 29.

21 Larry Neal, P 32.

22 Larry Neal, P 33.


24 Amiri Baraka “Introduction”, XII